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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [EG](#) [LE](#)  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: MARCH 14 SECURITY MOST IMPORTANT TO  
CARETAKER SOCIAL AFFAIRS MINISTER NAYLA MOUAWAD AND SON

REF: A. BEIRUT 733  
[B](#). BEIRUT 652

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#). (C) Linking success in the 2009 parliamentary elections to March 14's ability to "protect its people," caretaker Social Affairs Minister Nayla Mouawad and her son Michel Mouawad proposed that March 14 implement a security strategy. This would include developing a force within the Internal Security Forces (ISF) trained and responsible for defending Beirut, organizing a lobby of March 14 supporters within the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to coordinate with the Defense Minister, and coordinating a common platform with President Michel Sleiman on Hizballah's arms.

[2](#). (C) Gearing up for what are sure to be hotly contested elections, Nayla and Michel believe President Sleiman can help peel the Armenian Tashnaq party votes away from the opposition. Michel further argued that the March 14 parties work as a team to maintain the bloc's majority, rather than by party.

[3](#). (C) Nayla expressed her appreciation of at the USG donation of nearly 200 police vehicles to the ISF, calling it an important symbol of U.S. support. Assessing the likely candidates to become the next LAF Commander, Michel endorsed LAF Commander of the Tenth Brigade General Charles Chikhani. End summary.

MARCH 14 MUST  
PROTECT ITS OWN

[4](#). (C) The Charge, accompanied by PolOff, met caretaker Social Affairs Minister Nayla Mouawad and her son Michel at Nayla's home in Hazmieh on June 6. Calling the May clashes a "worse loss" for March 14 than what it lost politically in Doha (Ref A), Michel was adamant that March 14 give priority to resolving security issues.

[5](#). (C) Prior to the May clashes, he explained, March 14 relied on its relationships with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the Internal Security Forces (ISF), and the arms of Saad Hariri's Future Movement for protection. "This strategy failed," he asserted, and now March 14 needs to develop an

alternate approach.

¶16. (C) Looking ahead to the 2009 parliamentary elections, Michel concluded that the Lebanese citizens will vote for the leaders they believe can protect them. Sunnis in Tripoli realized during the clashes that "Saudi Arabia and Saad cannot protect them. This is a long-term strategy, beyond the 2009 elections, because if we do not get this right, al Qaeda's Ayman Zawahiri will be in Tripoli," he warned. He added that March 14 would not likely retain the majority if security did not improve in the north or in Beirut.

¶17. (C) First, he proposed, there should be a security strategy within the LAF. He explained that opposition supporters in the LAF are well-organized, which is not the case with the majority supporters within the Army. Soldiers seen as allied with Samir Geagea's Lebanese Forces are "disliked," Kataeb (Phalange) is not represented in the Army, and Hariri's Future supporters lack cohesion, said Michel. He recommended that a March 14 "lobby" be formed within the LAF to offer the alliance protection and to work with caretaker (and possibly re-appointed) Defense Minister Elias Murr.

¶18. (C) Rejecting majority leader Saad Hariri's idea to arm Future supporters, Michel argued that the ISF should have 700 to 900 well-trained men to defend Beirut. Believing that General Ashraf Rifi will stay on as ISF's DG, Michel suggested that the ISF develop a "serious plan" on how to defend Beirut. "Hizballah has to know it cannot take Beirut in ten minutes," he asserted.

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OPPOSITION TO  
MAINTAIN INSTABILITY  
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¶19. (C) Michel suspects the opposition will try to maintain a degree of instability throughout Lebanon to remind the majority that it can attack "at any moment." He noted that the opposition had recently opened over 100 offices in Beirut to "remind us they are here."

SLEIMAN, TASHNAQ PLAY  
BIG ROLE IN ELECTIONS  
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¶10. (C) Talk turned to the 2009 elections. Listing the areas where the competition will be tough between majority and opposition Christians (Zgharta, where the Mouawads are expected to face fierce competition against rival opposition member Suleiman Franjeh; Koura; Batroun; Kessarwan; Baabda; Zahle; Ashrafieh; Jbeil; and Metn), Michel said that President Michel Sleiman's influence will determine the winners.

¶11. (C) He concluded that March 14 must coordinate its election platform, based on disarming Hizballah, with the President. Egypt, he posited, could play a positive role in working with the President because Sleiman is close to Egypt and it was the first country to promote his presidency so "he has a debt to Egypt."

¶12. (C) President Sleiman is also best-positioned to move the Armenian Tashnaq party away from its alliance with the opposition, Michel proposed. Michel relayed that he befriended Tashnaq MP Hagop Pakradonian during the Doha negotiations and had met with him earlier in the week. Anticipating that March 14 could win 68-70 parliamentary seats, Michel said the addition of the Tashnaq seats would be important.

¶13. (C) He broke down his calculations wherein March 14 gains the following seats: 25 in the north, 15 in Beirut perhaps 1 in Jbeil, 2 in Kessarwan, 4 in Metn, 13 in Aley/Chouf, 2 in

Zahle, 6 in West Bekaa, and 2 in Sidon. In Sidon, the support of MP Bahia Hariri, Saad's aunt, and the group Jamaa Islamiyah would be important. Nayla relayed that representatives from Jamaa Islamiyah in Sidon visited her the previous month to argue that Hamas is separate from Hizballah. She characterized the politburo's chief in Lebanon, Ali Sheikh Ammar, as "moderate."

¶14. (C) Michel lamented that the Tashnaq are "still uncomfortable" with majority leader Saad Hariri, noting that in Doha, the Tashnaq had asked for a meeting with Saad, but were refused. Michel said the Tashnaq believe Saad is deliberately avoiding meeting with them. Michel expressed his fear that Saad will focus on Future party victories in the parliamentary elections, rather than March 14 alliance victories, which could cost March 14 the majority status.

¶15. (C) Michel explained that the Tashnaq used to take guidance from the Armenian community in Los Angeles, but are now looking more towards Armenia, which he added is close to Iran. Nevertheless, he concluded, the Armenians "cannot afford to be opposed to the U.S."

#### NEED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SHIA IN LEBANON AND IRAQ

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¶16. (C) Nayla argued for the "legitimization" of Shia in Lebanon, in particular, by forging a relationship between the Lebanese Shia and the Shia in Iraq. She expressed her disappointment that the electoral law agreed upon in Doha does not allow for a March 14 penetration into Shia communities (via proportional representation).

#### VOTE-BUYING

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¶17. (C) Speaking frankly about spending by political parties

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preceding the 2005 parliamentary elections to gain votes, Michel said that the timing of funding is critical. (Note: He is referring to the common practice of payment by candidates to buy votes in both villages and cities, often in the form of local development projects, such as building or repainting a church. End note.) "If the money comes too early in Tripoli, for example, you will have to pay again. Conversely, in the rural, Christian areas, you have to start very early because their votes cannot be bought quickly," Michel explained.

#### MARCH 14 IN-FIGHTING

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¶18. (C) Michel told us that the March 14 leaders had not met as a group for nearly a month to discuss politics. During the May clashes, he relayed, each leader acted on his own. Michel added that former President and Kataeb leader Amine Gemayel should relent in his push for a ministerial position, believing the competition among March 14 leaders is costing the alliance public support. Michel quoted PM-designate Fouad Siniora as saying, "When united, we win, and divided, we lose. We cannot negotiate with Arab leaders when March 14 leaders publicly dispute their positions."

#### USG'S POLICE CAR DONATION "VERY GOOD" OPTICS

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¶19. (C) Nayla was jubilant in her appreciation for the previous day's donation by the U.S. of 188 Dodge Charger police vehicles to the ISF. She said this demonstration of support is the best way the U.S. can change the perception that it was absent during the May clashes.

#### CHIKHANI "BEST" CANDIDATE

¶20. (C) Michel said he thought the LAF 10th Brigade General Charles Chikhani was the strongest candidate to become the next LAF Commander, saying that Second Brigade Commander BG Jean Kawahji is former President Emile Lahoud's "man," LAF G-2 Director General Georges Khoury would be better as the DG at Surete Generale, and the other frequently-mentioned candidate, current DG of Surete Generale Wafiq Jezzini, "obeys only Hizballah."

¶21. (C) Michel argued that if Georges Khoury, who is Christian, was named DG of Surete Generale, it would strengthen Sleiman's presidency by having a Christian at the helm of the traditionally Shia-dominated immigration and security branch. Besides, he added, if Khoury were instead the LAF Commander, he would focus more on becoming the next president.  
SISON